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A

DISCOURSE,
DELIVERED AT THE
CHAPEL in GUINEA-STREET,
BRISTOL,

FEBRUARY 28th, 1794,

Being the Day appointed by Royal Authority,

FOR A

National Fast.

BY

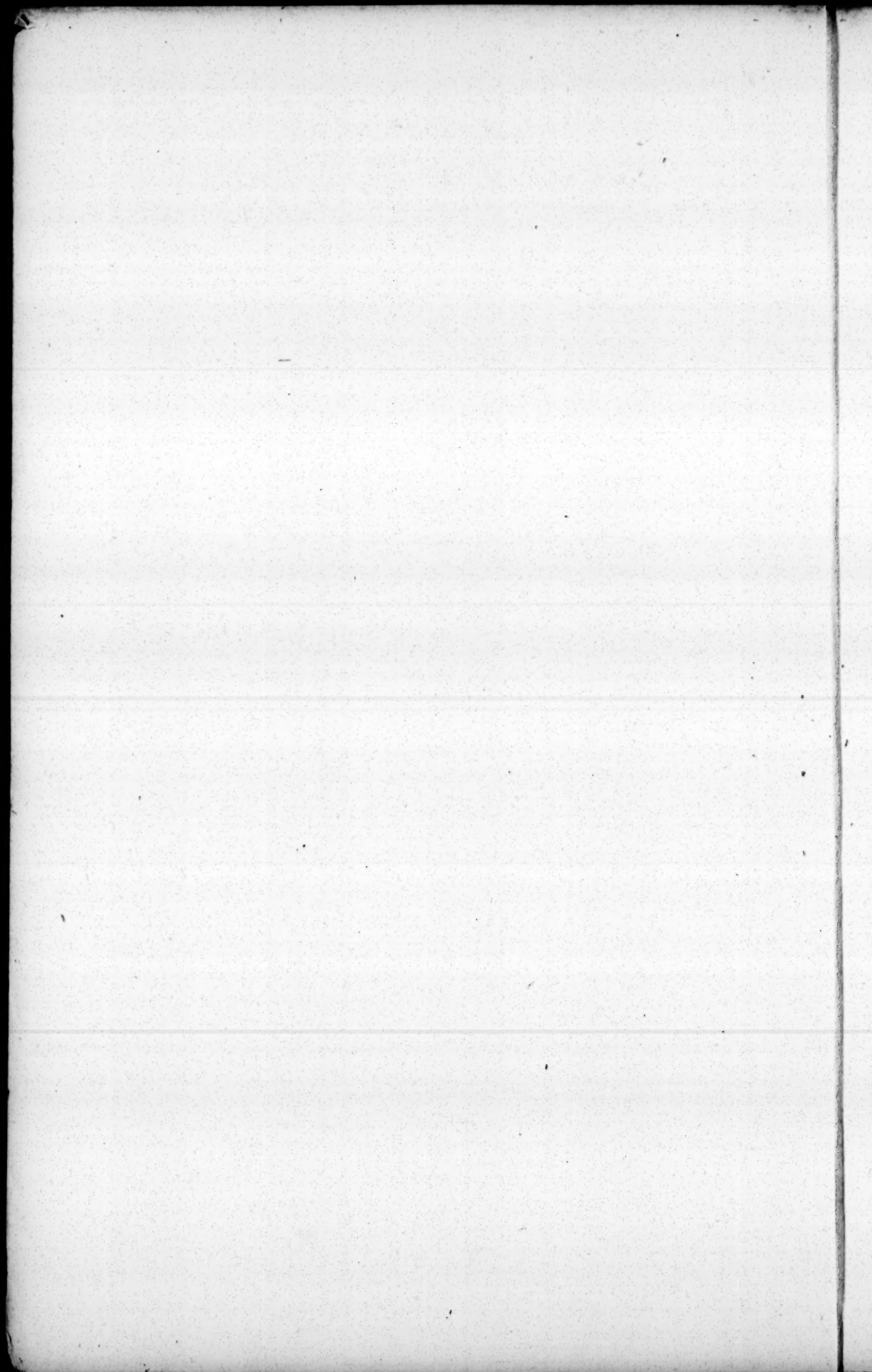
RICHARD RODDA.

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A

DISCOURSE, &c.

JEREMIAH V. Ver. 29.

Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?

HEAR the Word of the LORD, ye stout hearted, and far from righteousness; the LORD hath a controversy with the sons of men. Attend, lest the powerful arm of the eternal Jehovah descend, and wrath to the uttermost overtake you.

OUR sins of the scarlet and crimson dye, are awfully written as with a sun-beam on almost every man we meet. Our multiplied transgressions, call loudly for vengeance; and nothing but the interposition of our powerful Advocate, has prolonged our reprieve. What rapid strides have we made from one evil to another, until we have almost filled up the measure of our iniquities. As a nation, what avowed infidelity, bare-faced corruption, unblushing profligacy, and unbounded dissipation, parade our streets, and bid defiance to GOD; though he has solemnly declared, he will by no means clear the guilty. *Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

VIEW a neighbouring Nation fraught with the above-mentioned evils. Successful rebellion has emboldened the factious; disaffection, disunion, and discontent, like the increasing circles of troubled waters, have hastened the dissolution of the body politic, and pretended patriotism has given the finishing stroke.

THE great patrons of vain Philosophy and Infidelity, the genuine disciples of *Voltaire* and *Rousseau*, have dissolved all the ties of nature and fraternity ; and, overcome by a spirit of boundless ambition, have trampled under foot all laws, human and divine ! These ancient, hereditary enemies of Great Britain, collect their forces, and like a tremendous storm, hang over us, ready to descend, and sweep our land with destruction. Abroad the sword bereaveth, and at home there is as death.

AT a time when Britons should be united as the heart of one man, to oppose the common foe, what contention and strife are found among us ? How many false patriots wish to rise into power, even at the hazard of burying themselves in the ruins of their country ? Men of desperate fortunes, men of restless ambition, who, like rebellious Jeroboam, are ready to sacrifice every thing to the imaginary calves of lawless Liberty and Equality ! GOD preserve our Sovereign, and all his dominions, from the fraud and force of all wicked and unreasonable men, and turn the counsels of their Ahithophels into foolishness.

BUT I will flatter no man ; all have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD. Had we not sinned as a nation, what necessity would there have been of setting apart this day for fasting and humiliation ? The innocent have nothing to fear ; but we are not innocent ; this solemn day proclaims us guilty sinners, deserving the wrath of GOD, and the vengeance of eternal fire ! The charge is general : *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corruptors.* Isa. i. ver. 4. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint.

BE wise, O ye kings ; be instructed ye Judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear. His sacred Majesty King George, whose person I love, whose high office I revere, and in whose just rights I am ready (when legally called to it) to shed my blood, is nevertheless accountable to that Supreme Being by whom kings reign. The Royal appointment of this day is a tacit acknowledgment of this truth. Petitions from an earthly throne, addressed to the Throne of Glory, are public declarations, that the LORD GOD Omnipotent ruleth in the kingdoms of men.

THE King of Great Britain is a subject to none, but GOD and his Messiah. His elevation is upon the pinnacle of worldly greatness ; and his shining example is, or ought to be, as conspicuous as his eminent station.

IN the exercise of christian devotion, in diffusing domestic happiness, in the practice of personal virtues, where do we find his equal in the annals of kings ? In the suspension of persecution, in the protection of religious and civil liberty ; in the encouragement given to arts and sciences, in the extent given to trade and commerce—in what kingdom of the world can we find his rival, or even his competitor ? He hath fully made good that declaration worthy of himself, when he first ascended the throne of these realms : “ No man in my dominions shall be persecuted for conscience sake ! ” Words worthy to be written on the heart of every loyal Briton.

IF there are men in office of known profligacy, and barefaced infidelity, these corrupt streams are not derived from the fount of Majesty. The iniquity be on them, and upon their fathers' house ; the king, and his throne be guiltless.—It is greatly to be lamented, that under human governments, things sacred are too often treated

as the tools of politics ; distinguished situations in Church and State are frequently filled up by interest or favour, without a proper regard to the qualifications necessary for the discharge of them.

THE sins complained of by the weeping prophet, are the common, crying sins of our land. The Jewish nation were charged with swearing falsely ; and is this charge without foundation, when brought home to our consciences ? Are there no profane swearers among us ? Are there not thousands who wantonly call for damnation upon themselves, or their fellow-creatures ? Who blast, or curse their own eyes, limbs, &c. without any thought or remorse of conscience ? *Shall I not visit for these things ? saith the LORD.*

IF it be said by way of palliation, these are the vulgar, the ignorant who know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their GOD : I ask, did the prophet speak better among the rich and great ? No : He declares these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds. Have not prodigality and dissipation, produced intrigue, uncleanness, fornication, and adultery ? If honour and virtue are the badges of true nobility, let those who have dishonoured their rank by contracting habits of vice, blush, if they are capable of shame, at the contrast their manners exhibit to every thing truly noble, great and good ! My GOD ! what examples are these for persons in inferior stations to imitate ! The practice of such is obvious to all around them ; it is utterly inconsistent with, and totally contradictory to, every precept of the gospel. Do multiplied divorces increase their noble privileges ? Do they not rather evince the corruption of the heart, and tell how dubious is the parentage of the rising generation ? How numerous the tribe of those, who, destitute
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of every idea of their Creator, demean themselves to the basest offices of poisoning the minds, and debauching the morals of their countrymen, by bribery, perjury, drunkenness, revelling, quarrelling, and even murder itself.

AN external regard for Religion, has been ever esteemed as beneficial to society, and highly politic ; but many of the great and the gay have entirely emancipated themselves from these shackles.

Public worship, established in every nation under heaven, and observed by Jews, Turks, and Pagans, (however false their religion be,) they treat with contemptuous neglect ; though GOD hath said, ye shall sanctify my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary. *The day of GOD* is profaned not only by themselves, but they fix on it in preference to other days, for journies of pleasure ; thereby making their servants partakers in their crimes. *The worship of GOD* in their families is not known ; a bended knee to the Supreme Being would indeed be a prodigy under their roof. *The Book of GOD* lies buried in dust on their shelves, its sacred contents utterly unknown ; or if a smattering of it be picked up, it is merely in order to furnish matter for some infidel scoffer to ridicule.

Is not the most sacred *Ordinance* of eating and drinking the body and blood of CHRIST the LORD, trampled under foot, and turned from with abhorrence ? except, when as a qualification for honour or office. If this be not eating and drinking unworthily, I know not what is !

SHALL I add their professed infidelity, imbibed at the great corrupted public schools ; confirmed at the universities, or in foreign travels ; and consummated by that intercourse in which their station in life places them ; where their fellows are of the same stamp with themselves, and mutually conspire to harden each other ; whilst they
merrily

merrily say, the prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, believe no more of the reality of the religion of Jesus, than we do.

BUT will those who are called Ministers of Christ, bear this? O ye lights of the churches, ye stars in the right hand of him that sitteth on the throne, does this reflection belong to you? Does this character correspond with your office? GOD your offended Judge saith, if ye are seers by office, how is it that ye are blind in practice? If I appointed you to feed my flock, why do you suffer them to perish for hunger? If ye be the salt of the earth, where is your favour? If ye be the light of the world, why do ye not shine? Why do ye suffer those under your charge to sit in darkness? If I appointed you to be my mouth, why are ye dumb? If you be unequal to your duty, why are you ambitious to hold your offices? If equal to it, why do you not discharge it? The fire of the prophets, the precepts of the gospel, the examples of the apostles, the state of the church, the terrible day of judgment, eternal rewards and everlasting woes—are these nothing to you?

PERHAPS, you never entered in by the door into the sheep-fold; perhaps, you were never inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this sacred office; but if so, can any thing equal the horrible guilt of making such public professions in the ears of GOD and men? If you have intruded yourselves into the courts of GOD, if you have stepped over the threshold into his temple with conscious hypocrisy, and daring blasphemy, what can be expected from such an unhallowed mission? Again, have the holy epistles to Timothy and Titus been the models on which you have endeavoured to form your temper, your conduct and your labours? Are you
dead

dead to filthy lucre, fearless of offending, indifferent to men's esteem, ambitious of the honour that cometh from GOD only? Are you faithful in the discharge of your sacred trust, diligent in teaching and preaching the word, instant in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, comforting the feeble-minded, and confirming the weak?

HAVE you but one care, to approve yourselves faithful stewards of the mysteries of your holy religion, and wise servants in improving every talent committed to your care? Have you but one object, the glory of GOD in the salvation of immortal souls?

OR, have you intruded into the ministry for maintenance, sought it as a genteel profession, having entered it with a conscience polluted with falsehood, and impenitently persevering, made your profession a cloak of unrighteousness? Hath the fleece been dearer to you than the flock, and hath gain been your godliness? Hath criminal dissipation been your employment, instead of seeking those lost sheep, whom Jesus came to save? Have you flattered and fawned on the rich and great, seeking hereby that honour and preferment that cometh from man? Have you gained dignity in the church by the exemplariness of your conduct, the abundance of your labours, the fervour of your zeal, and the improvement of every spiritual gift? Or rather has it not been through your relation to, or connexion with, some great men in office? perhaps being the associate of their pleasures, or the partizan of their politics.

Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD.

How fearful, how awful the account such must give! and because disbelieved, despised and forgotten, the more sure, near and tremendous!

BUT

BUT shall we find more of the power of vital godliness among the civilians? Are these upright in all their undertakings? Do they never espouse a bad cause? Do they always observe that golden rule, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them, for this is the law and the prophets? It is utterly impossible this should be the case, where gold is the idol, and ambition is the spur. Is there no perversion of evidence, no subornation of perjury, no torturing of truth to disfigure its features, found in your courts? If ye are altogether clear in these matters, GOD be praised for the reformation!

HAVE the gentlemen of the vital faculty no share in the guilt of our nation? Are they all blameless and harmless? Do they never prolong a cure to increase their fees, and swell their bill? O ye sons of Hippocrates and Galen, if your religion has been ever proverbial, surely this day ye can claim no singular exemption from the experience of past ages.

WE boast of our numerous armies, of our wooden bulwarks; but are not those men who are called the defenders of our country, enslaved by their passions, and taken captive by the Devil at his will? We dare not impeach their courage, we dare not charge them with cowardice. No: They are bold and intrepid, they are resolute and persevering, they pant for fame, and burn for military glory. But are they not profane? Are not their mouths full of cursing and bitterness? while their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.

WHEN a victory is obtained, is it not wholly ascribed to the arm of flesh, to the skill and bravery of our commanders, and the undaunted heroic spirit of our men?

Whereas

Whereas the **GOD** of battles is seldom or never taken into the account. Shall I not visit for these things? Saith the **LORD**: Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? I do not intend at this time, to animadvert or reflect, upon any denomination of Protestant Dissenters, if they are possessed of as much Loyalty and Religion as I wish them; my heart shall say, Blessed are the people that are in such a case, happy are they who have the **LORD** thus for their **GOD**.

BUT my brethren, I dare not charge others, and wholly exempt ourselves. Are we who are called Methodist-preachers, and who have hitherto called ourselves members of the Church of England? are we altogether clear in this matter? We still retain the form of Godliness, but do we still retain the life and fervour of religion we once had? Are we as ready as at the beginning, to rush into every open door to spread the Gospel of Christ, in defiance of the World and the Devil; to follow Jesus through evil, as well as through good report? Are we undaunted in pain and weariness, unwearied in watching and fasting, do we still glory in the cross of our **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, and are we hereby crucified unto the world, and the world unto us? Are we as zealous for the **LORD** of Hosts as Phineas, in executing the will of the **LORD**, by giving the mortal wound to the body of sin? Fired with the love of precious souls, do we imitate Aaron, by rushing between the living and the dead, and with hands lifted up, pour out our hearts to that **GOD** who killeth and maketh alive? Or are we degenerated from one of our first principles, which is (under **GOD**) to save our own souls and the souls of those that hear us? Do we domineer and lord over **GOD**'s heritage, or are we still the servant of all, for Christ's sake? Do we imitate the great Shepherd, by feeding the flock, by gathering
the

the lambs with our arms, and bearing them in our bosoms ? Or do we by our intemperate zeal, cause the lame to wander out of the way, and the flock to drink of the waters of strife ? Do the rising generation bid fair to be as meek and lowly, as humble and teachable, as those who have gone before them, and into whose labours they have entered ? Is there no danger of our falling asleep in our watch-towers ? Is it not our duty to be sober and watch unto prayer ? If we sleep, will not our enemies watch over us for evil ? will they not rejoice in our fall, and shout in hellish triumph, there ! there ! so would we have it ; they are fallen, let them rise no more ? If there is found among us, evil surmisings, tale-bearing, back-biting, and evil speaking, Shall I not visit for these things ? Saith the LORD.—GOD of Elijah, thou that answerest by fire, kindle afresh the fire of divine love upon the altar of our hearts. Renew our commission ; bid us fly throughout the world, preaching the everlasting Gospel to every creature ; and let thy word be enforced by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven ! Help us to lift up our voice with strength ; to sound the jubilee of the LORD ; for the year of his Redcemed is come !

PARDON me, my brethren, if I have made too free with the Methodists and their Preachers ; consider me as a party concerned, and if there is any declension, I include myself in your condemnation. But there is a leading feature in the character of every real Methodist ; he fears GOD and honours the King. Where this is wanting in any member of the society, either the work was never genuine, or that member is fallen from the grace of his station. This is an observation I have made for forty years past, and the History of the Methodist-Soldiers in Flanders, under the valiant Duke of Cumberland, carries this truth to an earlier period.

THAT

THAT there is a firm, a general attachment to our King and Constitution among all denominations of men (except bare-faced Jacobins) I have no reason to doubt; and yet, to say we have every thing to hope, and nothing to fear would be presumptuous; for if the leaders and guides of the people are not innocent, how then can the people be clear!

It is true where the light of revelation has not shined, it may greatly extenuate the guilt. In popish countries where the sense of scripture is only announced from the lips of a Priest, there may be some palliation for the darkness that covers their misguided flocks: But no plea can be admitted for those Protestants, who have the Bible lying useless in their houses. These may know, if they will, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of GOD.

BUT a neglect of the Bible, that perfect rule of faith and practice; attended by a servile imitation of those who ought to know, and do better; has involved the general mass, in the same guilt and condemnation.

“Men of all ranks, lie drown’d in Sin;
“And Tophet yawns to take them in.”

BUT is there no way to escape? Is there no possibility of averting our impending ruin? Must GOD say, sword go through the sinful land; spare neither small nor great, but execute my judgments upon the guilty!

GREAT GOD! if the decree is gone forth, what habitation can secure us, from the cottage to the palace? What garrison can defend us? can numerous fleets and powerful armies, protect us from the vengeance of offended justice?

Where! where, for refuge shall the guilty fly!

COULD

COULD we sink to the centre of the earth, we should still remain naked and open to that Being, whose laws we have broken, whose Majesty we have affronted, and whose goodness we have despised.

BUT will not the Judge of all the earth do right ? Will he destroy the righteous with the wicked ? shall the remnant who still lift up the standard of the crucified Jesus, and stem the torrent of prevailing iniquity ; shall these who tremble at thy frown, be involved in the overflowing scourge ? Thine infinite Majesty declares against it. Eternal truth has spoken, Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him ! The righteous can say, In the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee, the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our law-giver ; he will save us. O ye precious sons of Zion ! ye pillars of the earth, ye lights of the world ; except the LORD of hosts, had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, or as the plains of Gomorrah.

CRY aloud, spare not ; call upon your neighbours, your relatives, and say, You must repent, or perish. You must banish your sins, or your souls will be banished from GOD for ever ! National sins unless timely repented of will draw down the judgment of GOD upon us.

LET the ministers of GOD weep between the porch and the altar and say, Spare thy people O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them. If we this day as a nation, have truly humbled ourselves before GOD ; we shall soon see the good effects of it ; he will not blot out our name from under heaven ; but he will be jealous for his land, and will pity his people. He hateth putting away. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD, I will heal your backslidings, and will love you freely.

O BRITAIN,

O BRITAIN, hear his voice, and harden not thy heart, turn at his reproof, he waiteth to be gracious ! He hath spared thee because he delighteth in mercy. For a small moment he hath hid his face from thee, but with everlasting kindness he will gather thee. Fear not, O land ; be glad and rejoice : for the LORD will do great things ! Thy light shall break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily : thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the LORD shall be thy re-reward.

THOUGH the calamities of war are deeply to be regretted, and the blessings of peace earnestly to be desired ; yet, it is not uncommon for the storms and tempests of winter to precede the chearing spring and fruitful summer. It is a maxim in divine politics, to bring good out of evil. The darkness that overspreads contending nations, will soon be dispelled by the beams of the uncreated sun of righteousness ; and the light of that day shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. The people that sit in darkness shall see a great light ; and the glory of the Lord shall arise upon them. Then will he turn upon them a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

INSTRUMENTS of cruelty shall be rendered useless ; swords shall be beat into plough-shares, and spears into pruning-hooks ; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim : but GOD will give them one heart and one way. Wars shall cease in all lands, and JESUS CHRIST the Prince of Peace shall be acknowledged by all. Every partition wall shall be removed, and Jews and Gentiles formed into one church, under the government of the great Shepherd and Bishop of Souls.

THE

THE LORD will in that day *visit* in mercy, he will walk in his sanctuary, he will rejoice in the habitable part of the earth ; and his delight will be with the sons of men.

HE will be the salvation and safety of his people, and they shall all know him from the least unto the greatest. The curse shall be removed from the earth, and the divine benediction fully restored : As I live, saith the LORD, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory ; then shall the morning stars again sing together, and all the sons of GOD shout for joy ! These are the true sayings of GOD, believe, and ye shall be established.

To ask when shall this come to pass, is more curious than useful ; GOD will hasten it in his time ; our duty is to be found watching, to be engaged in fervent, faithful, persevering prayer. The Spirit in the bride say come ; the bridegroom saith, surely I come quickly ! May all our hearts and voices cry out Amen ! Even so, come LORD JESUS !

THE END.